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EMIR O. FILIPOVIĆ, *Late Medieval Southeast Europe between Latin Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Ottoman Islam* (hagen text books 1). Hagen: Hagen University Press 2025. 345 pp. – ISBN 978-3-98767-496-9 [open access](#)

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The history of Southeast Europe in the late medieval period, particularly on the eve of the Ottoman expansion, is among the most complex, contested, and politically burdened fields of European historiography. Shaped by overlapping religious traditions, fragmented political authority, and long-term imperial entanglements, the region's past has been interpreted through a dense web of national, ideological, and confessional lenses. These interpretive layers have often obscured rather than clarified historical processes, leaving key questions deeply debated and frequently instrumentalized for modern political purposes. Despite the richness of specialized scholarship, synthetic monographic studies that attempt to grasp this complexity in a methodologically balanced and regionally integrated manner remain remarkably scarce, and comprehensive textbooks on the subject are virtually nonexistent. It is against this backdrop that any attempt to produce a textbook on late medieval Southeast Europe must confront not only the challenges of scale and diversity, but also the weight of historiographical tradition itself. In his ambitious and timely work, EMIR O. FILIPOVIĆ, Professor of Medieval History at the University of Sarajevo, offers a comprehensive introduction to the entangled histories of Southeast Europe in the late Middle Ages, a period marked by the interplay of Latin Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Ottoman Islam. Published as the inaugural volume in the *hagen text books* series, the book is primarily intended as a pedagogical resource for students. Yet it also represents an important intervention in ongoing debates over historiography, identity, and the place of the Balkans within medieval and global history.

The volume is structured as a teaching text, divided into thematic units that guide students through terminology, sources, major political developments, and broader interpretive issues. FILIPOVIĆ frames the book not as an exhaustive survey but as a scaffold upon which students may build their own critical engagements with a complex past. Each unit concludes with bibliographical notes and suggestions for further reading, carefully

distinguishing between works in English and German that are accessible to students, and more specialized literature in other languages. This pedagogical scaffolding is complemented by primary source excerpts, maps, and illustrative material, encouraging readers to practice distinguishing between sources and interpretation.

More specifically, the book is organized into three large and deliberately complementary course units, each subdivided into clearly delineated thematic sections that progressively build analytical depth. Course Unit 1, *Terminology and Concepts, Sources and Interpretations, Problems and Issues*, lays the conceptual and methodological foundations of the volume. It opens with a sustained discussion of spatial and chronological definitions, addressing the notoriously problematic terms ‘Southeast Europe’, ‘the Balkans’, and ‘late Middle Ages’, before moving on to the region’s political, cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Subsequent sections introduce key terminology and conceptual distinctions, most notably the difference between ‘Ottoman’ and ‘Turkish’, and provide an extensive overview of the multilingual source base, ranging from Dubrovnik and Italian archives to Byzantine, Western, and Ottoman narrative traditions. The unit culminates in a critical engagement with historiographical stereotypes, including the legacies of humanist *Antiturcica*, the notion of the ‘Turkish yoke’, and the binary framing of Christianity versus Islam, crusade versus jihad, and defeat versus victory. In doing so, this opening unit equips students with the analytical tools needed to navigate both primary sources and modern interpretations.

Course Unit 2, *Entangled Histories and the Struggle for Supremacy in Late Medieval Southeast Europe*, provides the book’s core narrative framework. It begins by situating Southeast Europe as a political space on the eve of Ottoman expansion, surveying the Byzantine Empire, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Bosnia in the fourteenth century, alongside competing religious currents and the strategic interests of Hungary and Venice. The subsequent sections trace the rise of the Ottoman polity from its Anatolian origins to its first settlements in Europe, paying close attention to methods of conquest, military organization, and Western responses. FILIPOVIĆ then devotes substantial attention to Southeast Europe as a theatre of war, including a nuanced treatment of the Battle of Kosovo (1389), the struggle for the Lower Danube, and the shifting alliances during the Ottoman succession crisis after 1402. The unit concludes with a comparative discussion of crusade and jihad, resistance and submission, and the elimination of vassal states under Mehmed II, emphasizing the gradual and negotiated character of Ottoman imperial

consolidation rather than a single moment of rupture.

The final Course Unit 3, *The Progressive and Continuous Transformation of Southeast Europe*, shifts the focus from conquest to *longue durée* transformation. Its first section examines the social and demographic consequences of war, slavery, and displacement, alongside processes of coexistence, economic exchange, and the reshaping of urban space. This is followed by a detailed overview of Ottoman institutions, including the *timar* system, taxation registers (*defters*), the *devşirme*, sharia law, and Islamic endowments (*waqfs*), which together structured everyday life in Ottoman Southeast Europe. The concluding section addresses the spread of Islam, analyzing the functioning of Christian ecclesiastical institutions within an Islamic polity, the role of dervishes, tekkes, and mosques in the spiritual landscape, and the long-debated question of conversion. Read together, these chapters underscore the book's central argument that Ottoman rule represented not an abrupt civilizational break, but a complex process of violence, adaptation and transformation that reshaped the region's political, social, and religious structures over time.

The book's stated goal is twofold: to provide a reliable survey of key events, personalities, and processes in late medieval Southeast Europe, and to challenge entrenched national narratives that continue to shape perceptions of the region. FILIPOVIĆ rightly emphasizes that religion in this period functioned less as a strictly theological identity than as a tool of political homogenization. Thus, the interactions between Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam must be read as political as well as spiritual dynamics, shaping alliances, conflicts, and cultural transformations. By situating these processes within broader Mediterranean and European contexts, the textbook moves decisively beyond the parochialism of nationalist historiographies. A recurring theme throughout the book is the persistence of historiographical stereotypes. FILIPOVIĆ traces how early modern humanists and anti-Turkish polemicists constructed a negative image of the Ottoman Turks that was then eagerly appropriated by nineteenth-century national movements. The trope of the 'Turkish yoke' or 'Turkocracy' provided a convenient foil against which new Balkan nation-states defined themselves. FILIPOVIĆ demonstrates how these narratives, depicting Ottoman rule as an age of oppression, rupture, and decline, were not only inaccurate but also profoundly influential, shaping scholarly and popular perceptions well into the twentieth century. Against this background, the textbook aligns itself with more recent scholarship that views Ottoman expansion less as a cataclysmic conquest than as a prolonged process of competition, contact,

negotiation, and adaptation.

Methodologically, the textbook emphasizes complexity rather than simplification. FILIPOVIĆ warns against the temptation to reduce Southeast European history to a string of battles, dynasties, or dichotomies of ‘East versus West’. Instead, he highlights networks of intermarriage, shifting alliances, and prosopographic detail as essential to understanding how power operated in the region. Particularly notable is his insistence on viewing Southeast Europe as a connected political space rather than a mosaic of discrete national units. This approach both resists the teleology of nationalist historiography and affirms the region’s relevance to broader European history.

The book’s strengths lie in its clarity of exposition, its integration of historiographical debates, and its pedagogical design. FILIPOVIĆ strikes a careful balance between providing sufficient detail – names, dates, and events – and maintaining accessibility for students who may be new to the field. The inclusion of source excerpts and reading lists encourages active engagement rather than passive consumption. Moreover, by foregrounding historiographical myths and stereotypes, the textbook equips students to approach the medieval past with critical awareness of its uses and misuses in modern politics.

There are, however, some limitations inherent in the genre. As a textbook, the volume cannot offer the depth or nuance of a monograph on particular topics such as religious conversion, slavery, or marcher lordships and provincial elite, issues which FILIPOVIĆ himself acknowledges remain open to further research. Specialists may find some sections introductory, though this is by design. At times, the emphasis on political and military developments overshadows social and cultural history, though the final sections do engage with questions of religious change, urban transformation, and the spiritual landscape of dervishes, tekkes, and mosques. These minor critiques, however, do not detract from the book’s overall significant achievement.

*Late Medieval Southeast Europe between Latin Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Ottoman Islam* makes a substantial contribution on two levels. Pedagogically, it provides an invaluable resource for teaching a region and period often marginalized in general medieval surveys. Historiographically, it challenges enduring national myths and offers a model of balanced, critical engagement with the past that is rarely seen. For students, it opens a window onto the complexities of a region that stood at the crossroads of em-

pires and religions. For scholars, it underscores the urgent need to continue disentangling Southeast European history from the ideological burdens it has long carried. FILIPOVIĆ's textbook is thus more than a teaching tool: it is a call for a new generation of historians and students to approach the late medieval Balkans not as a periphery, but as a central and dynamic part of Europe's shared history. Impressed by both the conceptual clarity and pedagogical potential of the volume, I intend to subject it to the ultimate test by structuring my undergraduate seminar on the Ottoman Balkans around its framework and assessing its impact on the most important audience of all: the students themselves.

**Keywords**

late mediaeval Balkans; Byzantine history; Ottoman history